



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES
Olympia, WA 98504-5710

April 14, 2006

Dear Caregiver:

As you know, children and youth who are missing from care or who are absent from care without authorization often find themselves in high-risk situations. To better respond to this issue, the Children's Administration (CA) has updated its policy regarding missing and absent children.

These changes create new reporting requirements for you as a caregiver and a quicker response time for CA social workers when a child is missing. Our goal is to keep children safe by working in partnership with you to effectively and actively search for children who are missing from care and provide a positive, solution-focused approach to working with them once they return to care.

What are the new requirements for caregivers with the new policy?

1. New definitions for children missing from care;
2. New reporting timeframe requirements for caregivers;
3. Information to report to law enforcement when reporting a child missing or absent from care.

When will this new policy take affect?

Because this is an issue that impacts the health and safety of children, it will take effect May 1, 2006.

Are there any supports for children missing from care?

To increase the opportunity of a safe landing for youth who have left care, a statewide hotline has been established. The hotline number is 1-877-550-HOPE. It routes the caller to speak with staff at the closest HOPE facility. Each facility provides 24 hour response to the hotline. The hotline will begin operation May 1, 2006.

Children's Administration is sending a letter to all youth in care letting them know of these changes and the support available to them. A hope card with the hotline information is also included with this letter.

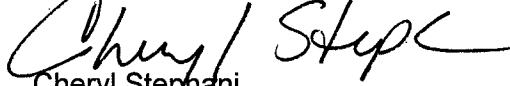


How can I get more information about these changes?

Attached with this letter are the definitions for children missing from care, the reporting timeframes for you as the caregiver when reporting a child missing or absent, and information about what you need to report to law enforcement when reporting a child missing or absent from care. A written copy of the policy is also available from the child's social worker or by going to the foster parent and caregiver web page at: <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/>.

If you have additional questions please contact the child's social worker. Thank you for all you do for children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cheryl Stephani". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Cheryl" and last name "Stephani" clearly distinguishable.

Cheryl Stephani
Assistant Secretary
Children's Administration

Children Missing or Absent from Care Reporting Requirements for Relative Caregivers

What are the new requirements for caregivers with the new policy?

- I. New definitions for children missing from care are categorized into three definitions, these include:
 1. **The child's absence is not authorized and his/her whereabouts is unknown.** In this situation a child is missing without permission, the responsible adults do not know where he or she is and the child is not in contact with those adults.
 2. **The child's absence is not authorized but his/her whereabouts is known:** The child is missing without permission, but the child has been in contact with the caregiver or social worker or the social worker may have periodic information about the child's location.
 3. **The child is taken from care.** While very rare, this means a child's location is unknown and it is believed the child has been taken by another person in violation of a court order.
- II. New reporting and timeframe requirements for caregivers include:
 1. Report a child who is missing from care to:
 - The assigned social worker or Children Administration's Central Intake if the social worker is unavailable (Central intake 1-800-562-5624 or 1-866-ENDHARM). If you reach the social worker's voice message you must call the Central intake number and report the child missing; and
 - Local law enforcement; and
 - Washington State Patrol's Missing Children Clearinghouse (1-800-543-5678 or 360-586-0030)
 2. Timeframe requirements for reporting a child missing is based on the circumstances and new definitions listed above. Caregivers are required to report the child or youth missing immediately or within six hours based on age and other identified risk factors.
 3. You must contact law enforcement immediately if:
 - a) The child has been, or is believed to have been, taken from placement;
 - b) The child has been or is believed to have been, lured from placement or to have left placement under circumstances that indicate the child may be at risk of physical or sexual assault or exploitation;
 - c) The child is age thirteen or younger;
 - d) The child has one or more physical or mental health conditions that if not treated daily will place the child at severe risks;
 - e) The child is pregnant or parenting and the infant/child is believed to be with him or her;

- f) The child has severe emotional problems (e.g., suicidal ideations) that if not treated will place the child at severe risk;
 - g) The child has a developmental disability that impairs the child's ability to care for him/herself;
 - h) The child has a serious alcohol and/or substance abuse problem; or
 - i) The child is at risk due to circumstances unique to the child.
4. If the child leaves school or has an unauthorized absence from school, you should consult with the child's social worker to assess the situation and determine when law enforcement should be called. If any of the factors listed above in section (3) (a) through (h) are present, the caregiver and the social worker may decide it is appropriate to delay notification to law enforcement for up to four hours after the end of the school day to give the child the opportunity to return on their own.

III. Information to report to law enforcement and to the social worker when making a missing child report, if available, includes:

- 1. When the child left;
- 2. Where the child left from;
- 3. What the child was wearing;
- 4. Any known behaviors or interactions that may have precipitated the child's departure;
- 5. Any possible places the child may go to;
- 6. Any special physical or mental health conditions or medications that affect the child's safety
- 7. Any known companions who may be aware of and involved in the child's absence;
- 8. Other professionals, relatives, significant adults or peers who may know where the child would go; and
- 9. A recent photo of the child.